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ABSTRACT

To stimulate discussion among students, an instructor introduced interrupted videos in an interpersonal communication class. The videos consisted of brief 2-3 people conversations taken from films such as "Ordinary People," "Volunteers," "Planes, Trains, and Automobiles," and "The Joy Luck Club." Sometimes the class watches the video and comments on it; other times specific questions are asked prior to watching the clip. Comments about a scene in "Kramer vs. Kramer" and other films show how students can examine the verbal and nonverbal behaviors and predict what the characters might do next. Although there are other ways to stimulate critical thinking, using brief video clips is very effective. Some of the topics which lend themselves to examination in specific video clips are: gender, self-disclosure, self-concept, perception, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, emotions, conversation, intercultural communication, relationships, power, and conflict. (NKA)

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ED 391 204

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Using Contemporary Media to Develop Students' Observation Skills of Interpersonal Behavior

I have taught Interpersonal Communication for the last several years. When I began teaching the class, I would give lectures on the concepts and encourage students to add a personal dimension by relaying their stories. Most of the time, no one would add anything. I would have to compensate by sharing events that had occurred in my life. Occasionally students would be encouraged to discuss personal events, but it tended to be the same ones each time. The quiet students would stay quite. I was seeking for a method which would encourage more student involvement, and enhance critical thinking skills. While I knew that some interpersonal classes watch entire television shows or movies, I wanted to allow maximum time for discussion.

I began analyzing television shows and movies, looking for brief two and three people conversations which would introduce interpersonal concepts. I decided to use interrupted videos to stimulate discussion. All of the students would be watching these clips together, thus they would start with the same example. Yet, their difference backgrounds would allow them to perceive the same events differently, allowing for

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a rich discussion of not just the concepts, but how other people perceive the same event. Some of the movies I use clips from include *He Said, She Said, Kramer vs. Kramer, Volunteers, Joy Luck Club,* and *Ordinary People*. On television, I have selected portions of situation comedies such as *Roseanne, My So-Called Life, Thirty Something,* and *Friends*, and some made-for-television movies such as *Breathing Lessons and A Woman of Independent Means* which graphically illustrate interpersonal concepts.

Sometimes I ask the class to watch the video clip and then ask for comments. *Volunteers* in a wonderfully funny movie staring Tom Hanks and John Candy. They are volunteers in the Peace Corps. An important concept when discussing intercultural communications is the problem with ethnocentrism. We all tend to assume our culture is the best and that other cultures have inferior customs. In this particular scene from *Volunteers*, since the natives speak a different language, John Candy speaks loudly and slowly, using lots of hand gestures. He insists they cut down certain trees for a bridge. When he is told that the spirits of the village live in these trees, he laughs. Since this is exaggerated for the purposes of the movie, it's quite obvious, and students begin discussing it, drawing on their experiences with intercultural communication.

Other times I ask the class specific questions prior to watching the clip. For example, before they watched a few minutes from *Kramer vs. Kramer*, I asked them to observe Dustin Hoffman's nonverbal behavior vs Meryl Streep's nonverbal behavior and how if affected the verbal communication. I also asked them to look for specific barriers

to clear thinking. The Kramers meet in a bar a year after she left him, and students commented that he treats her as though she were the same person who left him, while she obviously has a new perception of herself. The following conversation ensued:

> "See how he's jabbing his finger at her? He expects her to submit."
>
> "Yeah, but she's been living on her own. She's not the same women who left him."
>
> "Well, he has no idea. He's frustrated. That's why he breaks the glass. He expects her to go back and she can't.

They continued to examine the verbal and nonverbal behaviors and predict what the characters are likely to do next. Then they shifted into reflective comments. Two students said:

> "Sometimes we have to go on with our lives in a different way."
>
> "This actually made me see myself."
>
> Other comments from students while discussing scenes from videos:
>
> "The graphic explanation in the movie helped to reinforce it in my mind. These helped to illustrate what we were discussing."
>
> "I'm kind of going through the same thing. *Thirty Something* helped me to see what other classmates' views were on the topic."
>
> "We all live in our own turtle shell, but don't realize the difference in another. The world is a melting pot in which each culture has made a difference in or lives." [*Deep Space Nine*]
>
> "Because I can see, hear, feel what a person tries to communicate, it makes me see inside."
>
> "I liked *He Said, She Said* because it stirred up the class and got everyone involved. The way you see it may not be the way I see something or the way it actually is. You only see what you want to see."

[*Woman of Independent Means*] "I very often treat my grandchild the same and after watching the segment I became more aware of my daughter's reaction to the situations, however it wasn't because I wanted to be in control. I was just attempting to be pleasant."

[*Breathing Lessons*] "Too much self-disclosure is not good."

[*Breathing Lessons*] "You can really self disclose to strangers easier sometimes and you don't always realize it. It can really make a difference.

[*Harry and Son*] "When we share angry feelings, we still love each other. You can't keep stuff bottled up."

"Nancy and her husband in *Thirty Something*--they bypassed each other.

"It's very important to communicate on an honest level and be true to oneself instead of playing games and assuming the other person can read you mind."

"*Ordinary People* made me realize how differently people handle a crisis."

I am constantly amazed at the insights students pull from their discussions of the videos. Although there are other ways to stimulate critical thinking, using brief clips from videos is very effective. It requires some time on the part of the instructor, but it's well worth it. The following list is fairly comprehensive, although every semester I discard some and add new videos as I discover good ones. I recently viewed a Seinfeld episode which I thought showed promise as a doorway to a discussion about emotions, relationships, and nonverbal communication.

GENDER	*Tootsie* (He gets a job as a woman)
SELF DISCLOSURE	*Breathing Lessons* (Maggie self-discloses to a stranger in a cafe.
SELF-CONCEPT	*Thirty Something* (2nd episode, Hope goes shopping wit her mother)

PERCEPTION	*He Said, She Said* (any part)
VERBAL	*Kramer vs Kramer* (The Kramers met in a bar a year later)
NONVERBAL	*Planes, Trains, and Automobiles* (John Candy and Steve Martin in bed)
	Thirty Something (2nd episode Hope tries to communicate with her eyes to her husband that she doesn't want to go shopping with her mother)
EMOTIONS	*Harry and Son* (Harry and Son get into an argument over half a can of beer)
CONVERSATION	*Singles* (Main character tries to pick up a girl at a club)
INTERCULTURAL	*Joy Luck Club* (Daughter brings fiancee home for dinner--disaster!)
	Volunteers (John Candy tries to explain how to build a bridge)
	Deep Space Nine (many of the episodes which demonstrate different cultures)
RELATIONSHIPS	*Oprah* (John Gray WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS, MEN ARE FROM MARS)
	Ordinary People (The whole last scene beginning with the golf game)
	My So Called Life (The first episode and the tenth, shows the relationship between daughter and mother, and then between the mother and HER mother)
POWER	*A Woman of Independent Means* (Sally Fields intervenes between her daughter and granddaughter)
	Wall Street (many of the scenes)
CONFLICT	*Thirty Something* (An episode in which Nancy takes exception to something her husband says about her talent as an artist)